"To promote Christian ideals for agriculture and rural life; to interpret the spiritual and religious values which inhere in the processes of agriculture and the relationships of rural life; to magnify and dignify the rural church; to provide a means of fellowship and cooperation among rural agencies: *Toward a Christian Rural Civilization.*"

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WHAT IS DEMOCRACY?

By Liberty Hyde Bailey*

In all the world the foremost word is now democracy. Everyone uses it or thinks in its terms. Yet it would be difficult to find a clear meaning for it in the minds of all those who speak.

I. WHAT IT IS NOT

I shall first engage my reader's attention by saying what democracy is not. And it is needless to say that I speak not of democracy or of the democrat in the sense of a political party issue in North America or elsewhere.

Freedom is not democracy: it is only release from restraint. No people needs discipline and restraint so much as a democratic people, but it should be self-discipline. Freedom is only a condition antecedent to democracy. Of all forms of society, democracy is farthest removed from anarchy.

Liberty is not democracy: it is only the political concept of freedom and unrestraint. Democratic peoples are always liberated peoples, yet liberated peoples may not be democratic. A people may be ever so free politically and yet not constitute a democracy.

What is familiarly called personal liberty is not democracy. It is more likely to be license to do as one will or to indulge in one's habits. It comes within the realm of conduct. Democracy is acting together rather than acting separately. Much of what we know as personal liberty is only personal selfishness.

So, also, laissez-faire is not democracy. No man liveth to himself alone, and no community of men can go as it chooses; nor is free will independent of its relations to endless social and civic situations.

What is called a "free press" is not a gauge of democracy. In some of its forms it may be a menace to democracy, controlling public policies, mak-

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ing public officers, trying criminals. The value of an open press as a means of information and even of education is apparent, yet the voice of the press may become a class interest as much as may the voice of capital or labor or agriculture. It may become so powerful that government caters to it; or a government may ride on it for its purpose.

Public education, although indispensable, does not assure democracy. Education tends toward superior commercial advantage and toward selfish opportunity. Even those well educated at public expense may use their education only for personal pleasure and gain, and they are likely to employ their added powers in vaster projects of dominion. The discussions of the present moment show that highly educated persons may not be democrats.

Socialism, as we now know it, is not democracy. It is likely to be group tyranny. In operation it may be one of the most intolerant forms of public action. We gradually adopt the projects of socialism, but we avail of them successfully only as classes lose their force and as we are able to apply them to the welfare of the Demos.

Public ownership is not democracy. It may provide no advanced opportunity, and it may take away stimulus, incentive, and enthusiasm. Public ownership as a means of regulation and to eliminate abuses is one thing; as an agency of deprivation it is quite another thing. The outstanding danger in public ownership in practice lies in the fact that we still endeavor to govern society by the political method; this means that the vote getting and political managership of the administration is kept constantly in the foreground. Nor do we see much greater hope in the so-called business management of public ownership. The only safe management is on the basis of public service, a form of administration in which we are not yet proficient.

Nationalization of land and industry is not democracy. It may be a long step toward democracy if the people is developing in that direction. It may be repressive if the people is not developing democratically and is under the whip of a supreme state.

Organization of groups of the people for civic or political or economic ends is not democracy. The politics of group control is likely to be deeply despotic or tyrannical. Organization may be a means of controlling public opinion and binding individual action, preventing civic and personal growth. We live in days of vast organization, and at the same time in days of developing democracy, yet these are not cause and effect. Organization is quite as often an anti-democratic growth within a democracy. It is not the basis of free institutions, at least not as organization is now prevailingly understood, which is the power to control and to make demands. Herein lies what I must consider the failure of the present organized labor movement in a democracy: its motive, as mostly displayed to the public, is to make demands or to control situations rather than to serve.

The levelling of society, then, is not democracy, nor is uniformity in public action democracy. All men are created free and equal in respect of their citizenship in the world and in their rights before the bar of justice, but they are not all physicians or artists or builders or farmers nor have they equal or even comparable abilities. The essence of free democracy is to remove the bans from those who would avail themselves of opportunities. A society characterized by uniformity would be a dreadful thing.

There is need enough for reducing the stratifications in society, but

the process is to elevate from beneath not to level from above.

All aristocracies, to be sure, stand in the way of democracy, whether they be of birth, position, military rank, of land or of wealth. Yet we must distinguish between aristocracy and superiority, which latter arises from personal development and public service. Real superiority is never arrogant, demands no special privilege, is not puffed up, does not behave itself unseemly. Without superiority there is no democracy, but only uniformity.

Decentralization is not democracy. A strong centralized government may be essential for the transaction of public affairs; of course the people should have the power to terminate any government, as they also have the right in the first place to create it. Many good Americans fear for democracy in wartime because the president and certain executive departments exercise so much power; but such power is necessary for the prosecution of war, and we elect a president every four years. The people have only delegated the power for a definite purpose; they have not given up the will to control.

Therefore, democracy cannot be granted by a government and particularly not by a despotic ruler. A despot may release his hold, he may even concede a magna charta, but democracy lies not with him. Parliaments and congresses do not make or bestow democracy, nor even assure it. Essays written by statesmen, and constitutions bequeathed by oligarchic bodies, and privileges graciously granted, do not constitute democracy.

And, contrariwise, democracy cannot be won by force of arms. By arms we may overthrow despots, wipe out tyrannies, discard old bondages, and thereby prepare the way. We may provide peoples the opportunity.

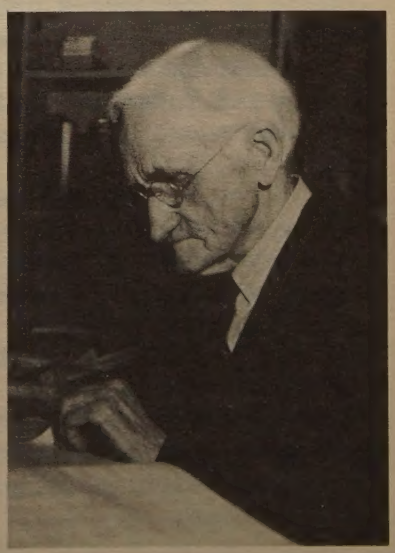
Democracy cannot be bestowed. It cannot be given to anybody. It cannot be handed out. It must be won, by patient preparation. It is a result, not a gift.

II. WHAT IT IS

Democracy is a state of society. It is such a constitution of the social order as allows each member to develop his personality to the full and at the same time to participate in public affairs on his own motion. The Demos is self-controlling.

So, likewise, is peace a state of society. Certainly it is not an agreement not to fight, not even a successful conciliation, not a treaty or an understanding. A treaty of peace is only a pledge of the contending parties that under certain conditions they will behave themselves. Peace inheres in the nature of the social organization. It is not external, nor extraneous, nor a symptom. It is one of the fruitions of democracy, an evidence that people have arrived at enduring values and have learned self-control.

Democratic society expresses itself in many ways: in government and other national action, in religion, in an educational intention, in some particular social order.



Liberty Hyde Bailey

Democracy is primarily a sentiment -- a sentiment of personality. It is the expression of the feeling that every person, whatever his birth or occupation, shall develop the ability and have the opportunity to take part. Its motive is individualism on the one hand and voluntary public service on the other -- the welfare and development of the individual and of all individuals.

The wealth of a democracy lies in its people, not in its government or its goods. The product of democracy is self-acting men and women. The well-being and progress of society require that every citizen, of whatever age, may have the opportunity to discover himself or herself and to make use of himself largely in his own way. Any theory of the State as the end of society or as the motive of government leads away from democracy as darkness leads away from light. It may be said that the State can bequeath privileges to its people and can develop the highest forms of prosperity; very good: yet its very perfection is its condemnation, its strength is its weakness, and it will explode of its own pressure. The citizen must be able to think of himself in other terms than in terms of the State. The State is not the end of society any more than the church is the end of religion.

A democratic society can exist only on the basis of active and enthusiastic public service. Essentially this service is voluntary, yet it may be required of those who do not volunteer. This service is far broader and deeper than military service alone.

Democracy rests on living conditions and on civic opportunities. It is rooted in the daily life, in what a person is able to acquire in goods, in his intellectual progress, in what he is competent and at liberty to think, in his freedom of movement, in his spiritual aspiration, in his expression of himself. The person is to be placed in the most advantageous environment.

If the person is to be placed in the most advantageous conditions and environment, so will he desire a similar privilege for his neighbor and voluntarily assume the responsibility of which I speak. The yielding of advantage to another, the giving up of granted "rights" that another may have a larger life, are in the very essence of the democratic state.

Democracy, as distinguished from government, is an end or aim. It is a mission. It is not a by-product of industrialism; it is not an accident or an incident; it is not an adjustment of business; it is not an arrangement between organized interests. A country is democratic only when its people think in terms of democracy. Public sentiment is the most powerful force in democracy.

So, therefore, are we to distinguish democracy from politics, for politics, as men have come to know it, is a game played for advantage. Not until present forms of party lines have subsided or disappeared in the nations of the world will the best democracy appear and persist.

The fundamental concept in a democracy is that government and the other forms of public action are expressions that inhere in the people themselves. Then, therefore, the free education of all the people into large views of life is essential if the people are to be responsive and competent. The intention of this education is personal and social, not to safeguard and support a superimposed state.

In a democracy the people is the State. The character and the quality of the people determine the nature of the State. Democracy is a spiritual power or product in a people. It is invisible. Spiritual forces are stronger than guns.

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